

# PROPELLER ISLAND

BY  
JULES  
VERNE

## STORY OF AMERICAN BILLIONAIRES



Propeller Island, the marvel of the twentieth century, was an earth-covered, floating isle of steel of about the same area as that part of New York south of Forty-second street. Equipped with every comfort and luxury that wealth could command and science devise, the American billionaires who inhabited this terrestrial paradise should have been content and happy in their year-long voyage in the perpetual Summer of the Pacific. But a bitter feud arose between the heads of the two wealthiest families of the island, and deadly civil strife was only temporarily averted by the sudden appearance of great dangers which threatened the lives of all. It is of these that this third instalment of the story tells.

### CHAPTER VIII.

WITH the dazzling shield of the ocean stretching to the horizon on every hand at times, then picking its way between scores of nameless tropic isles, the days ablaze with sunshine and the nights lit by the great constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, the "Jewel of the Pacific," as this home of billionaires was sometimes called, moved ever southward. It was during these halcyon days that the quartet became better acquainted with the King and Queen of Malacalla, and one evening surprised them by appearing at their modest villa and giving them a record of their choicest music.

To this royal pair, so lightly esteemed by their fellow-townsmen, they presented the utmost deference. Until three years before the King of Malacalla had ruled over one of the oldest countries of Europe. A man of great scientific and artistic attainments, his distaste for the throne had grown with advancing years, and, seeing that the time was not far off when his kingdom should become a republic, he decided to abdicate and end his days as peacefully and happily as he might. But, though his fortune had been truly imperial in its proportions, judged by the European standard, he found his income of forty millions a year barely sufficient for his support upon Propeller Island, and so, a high-salaried position being vacant in the observatory, he applied for and obtained the place.

It was frequently the custom of the quartet to spend the night with him in the observatory watching the stars, and it was on one of these occasions that a strange thing happened which brought about some remarkable occurrences.

The night in question had been brilliantly moonlit, but toward 3 in the morning the watchers were amazed to see the heavens grow as dark as if with dense clouds. A glance at the barometer showed that no storm was at hand, and on looking downward they saw the ground being rapidly covered with a thick carpet of powdery red dust. Then there was a brilliant flash of light along the western sky, followed in a few seconds by a muffled roar like the discharge of innumerable cannon. For forty-eight hours this volcanic shower continued, and whether it was day or whether it was night could only be told by consulting the chronometers, for the dust lay so thickly everywhere that even the great electric lights, smothered in its continual downpour, failed to illuminate the dense darkness.

It was in the midst of this that a slight shock made the island shiver from end to end. It was soon ascertained that a steamer of large tonnage had been run down, but there was no trace of the craft to be discerned through the thick darkness, and so, after investigation had shown that the island had received no injury, the mighty engines began to revolve again.

The dust ceased to fall at the end of the second day, and then came the giant task of cleaning the island, for it lay shrouded in dust many inches thick. While this work was going on two British men-of-war were despatched in the offing. They drew nearer, and presently a boat put out from one of them, and an officer, who proved to be Captain Turner, representing Rear Admiral Sir Edward Collinson, came ashore. The Governor of the island gave him an immediate audience, during which Captain Turner stated that at a certain hour the day before the British ship Glen had been run down by Propeller Island, receiving in-

juries from which she sank some hours afterward. All on board had been saved, but he had come to demand an indemnity of \$5,000,000 for the loss of the vessel and cargo. After some discussion this was finally paid by the Governor, and the British warships suddenly withdrew. But every British ship is an integral part of that empire, and not one of these parts can be destroyed with impunity. There were yet other singular consequences to this accident.

Propeller Island was now approaching Tonga-Tabou, one of the largest of the Tonga Islands, where the quartet, going ashore the afternoon of their arrival, became chance witnesses of one of the peculiar half-religious fetes of the savages. Gazing to the advice of Sarol, the Malay captain, who had extolled the industry of the New Hebrides natives, a hundred of these had been ordered to meet Propeller Island at Tonga-Tabou in order to expedite the freeing of the streets and buildings from the volcanic dust which enumbered them, and when the island departed they joined their compatriots, as they proved faithful laborers, and as their task would hardly be completed before Erromango, their home, would be sighted, Propeller Island seemed doomed.

### CHAPTER IX.

But while this deep-laid plot of the Malay chief was ripening, something occurred which involved the conspirators and their intended victims alike in a common danger. The afternoon of the 18th of January, while Propeller Island was nearly in the centre of that part of the sea which separates the Tonga and the Fiji groups, a steamer of seven or eight hundred tons was sighted, apparently heading for Starboard Harbor. It showed no flag, but it was surmised from its build to be an English craft. As the sun went down it seemed to have changed its course and to be proceeding away from the island.

The night which followed was dark and moonless, and the heavens were obscured by thick clouds, but, though the thunder muttered in the distance, no rain fell. Between 2 and 3 in the morning the watchmen at the batteries heard curious noises—strange growls and roars—which seemed to come from all along the littoral. The next day it was discovered that fifty sheep had been half devoured during the night, as well as a dozen cows and a score of horses, apparently by wild beasts.

But the island was in mid-ocean, out of sight of land, and such a thing seemed utterly impossible. The passengers on the first car for Larboard Harbor could not believe their eyes when they saw two gigantic lions and a tiger spring from the shrubbery upon them as they sped along. Then came the news that two immense alligators had been seen upon the banks of the river, and from every quarter of the island people hurried to the Governor's office with tales of savage beasts that they had seen and escaped from.

The owners of the shops and houses closed and barricaded their doors and windows, and the soldiery, commanded by Colonel Stewart, patrolled the streets. The Council of Thirty convened and called upon all the male inhabitants whose age would permit to take up arms for the extermination of the swarm of wild animals that had invaded the island.

At first it was the theory that some ship loaded with wild beasts for European

menageries had been wrecked off shore during the night, but one of the members of the Council suddenly arose and exclaimed:

"A ship was sighted yesterday afternoon, was it not? A ship flying no flag. These animals must have come from her."

"Yes!" cried Jem Tankerden, catching the speaker's meaning intuitively. "These animals were placed upon this island last night by design. The ship was of English build. It was the work of our eternal enemy, John Bull!"

"Oh!" cried the Council with one

in sincere gratitude and friendship.

The next day Mrs. Tankerden and Mrs. Coverly, the latter accompanied by her charming daughter, Dr. Coverly called, and a few days later Jem Tankerden went formally to Mr. Coverly's mansion to ask for Dr. Coverly's hand in marriage for his son, Walter. It was willingly granted. No difficulties arose about the question of pecuniary settlements, for it was agreed that each of the young people should have a marriage portion of \$200,000,000 to start housekeeping on.

"Four hundred millions," remarked Pinchinnat, judiciously. "They will have enough to live on—even in New York."

### CHAPTER X.

The date chosen for the wedding was the 27th of February, and by careful computations it was ascertained that Propeller Island would at that time be among the New Hebrides, the home of Captain Sarol and his savage band.

Cablegrams were sent to Paris ordering the bride's trousseau, and it was arranged that a fast steamer should bring this and

at once, trusting blindly to Providence that they would find their beloved comrades alive on their return.

Cyrus Bickerstaff acted promptly when he heard of Pinchinnat's danger. He sent for the British Governor of the island and told him the seemed unwilling to be of any assistance) that unless he furnished soldiers and guides on the instant he would turn the batteries of Propeller Island upon the place and make it a desolate waste in fifteen minutes. The Governor therefore yielded with the best grace possible.

When they arrived at the village once more they were surprised to find it entirely deserted. By that time night had fallen, and they saw a great light shining through the forest. Approaching, they came upon a vast and tumultuous crowd of savages dancing and howling about a huge fire, hard by which Pinchinnat, half naked, was bound to a tree. They came up just in the nick of time, for a Fijian chief stood before the unhappy Frenchman on the point of splitting his skull with the axe which he was poisoning in the air.

The soldiers rushed up, and in the twink-

the boat could have made so quick a passage.

The early risers next morning were surprised to see that the steamer, now but a few miles away, was not the one expected, but one flying the flag of the Standard Island Company, and therefore the bearer of official instructions. Scarcely had the steamer been docked before a passenger leaped ashore. He was recognized as one of the high agents of the company, and, refusing to reply to any questions, hastened to the City Hall, and there demanded an immediate audience with the Governor "regarding a most urgent affair."

Cyrus Bickerstaff received him in his private office, and for a quarter of an hour the door remained tightly closed. Then a telephonic call was sent out for the immediate assembling of the Council of Thirty, and when these arrived the agent made to them the following formal declaration:

"Under date of January 23 the Standard Island Company, Limited, made an assignment to William T. Pomeroy, who has been given full power to act as he may deem best for the interests of the company aforesaid."

Mr. William T. Pomeroy himself and none other it was who made this statement, and it was received by the American billionaires with their customary sang froid. Pomeroy went on to explain the causes of this failure: unsuccessful speculations, vast estates in Arkansas which had been swallowed up by an unforeseen geologic depression. It was proposed to organize a new company, but before seeking for a foreign capital it had been decided to offer to the Standard Islanders themselves a chance to become proprietors of their floating home.

Business matters do not lag in the United States of America. A moment after Pomeroy had finished his speech Nat Coverly and Jem Tankerden offered him \$400,000,000 for the island and all that pertained to it. He could take the offer or leave it—and he took it.

The Council had assembled at 8:13 and it adjourned at 9:47. In this brief space of time Propeller Island had passed into the hands of the two "archibichismes," who, with a few of their friends, formed the new firm of "Jem Tankerden, Nat Coverly & Co."

"These Americans are very extraordinary," said Pinchinnat to his two companions when the news was announced. "They spend less time over a matter of \$400,000,000 than I do bargaining with some savage chef for a new cooking recipe."

"This new partnership between Tankerden and Coverly cannot last," gloomily announced the pessimistic Sebastian Zorn. "I am glad we have sent all our money to New York, for it will be easier to draw it from the bank there than it will be to procure it from the one at Billion City when the island is a thousand fathoms deep in the ocean."

"Silence!" cried Pinchinnat gayly. "Allons for the fete. Let us decide what pieces we shall play at the wedding, for we have no other gift than our music which we can offer to the bride."

In due time the shipload of marvellous wedding presents arrived, and it was with glistening eyes that Sarol, the Malay captain, listened to the accounts of their fabulous richness. Propeller Island was now approaching the New Hebrides group, and, owing to his familiarity with those

of pilot. It may have been chance or it may have been design, but under Sarol's guidance the island made such slow progress that it was not until the morning of the 27th of February, the day fixed for the wedding, that the first of these islands was sighted, and a little later Erromango itself rose to view. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon Propeller Island dropped anchor a mile off shore, for as soon as the fete attendant upon the wedding were over it was Commodore Simcoe's intention to disembark the Malays there and to turn again toward the equator and proceed back to Madeline Bay.

By order of the authorities every one was given a holiday in honor of the occasion, the only exception being the few guards scattered along the island's coast line. In the evening the island blazed with such a multiplicity of lights that the disappearance of the sun was hardly noticeable. The religious ceremony had been performed late in the afternoon, but it was nearly 11 before the young couple proceeded to the Hotel de Ville, where the civil marriage was to take place. Following the young couple and their families came a vast crowd, made up of all the inhabitants of the island, marching in a long procession up the broad avenue which led to the municipal building.

Suddenly there was a burst of loud cries from the larboard end of the island, followed by the report of firearms, and, stricken with sudden surprise, the procession came to an abrupt halt. A moment later several of the coast guards, some of them bleeding from their wounds, rushed up, and with breathless haste gasped out that Propeller Island had been invaded by a band of New Hebrides savages, three or four thousand in number, with Captain Sarol at their head.

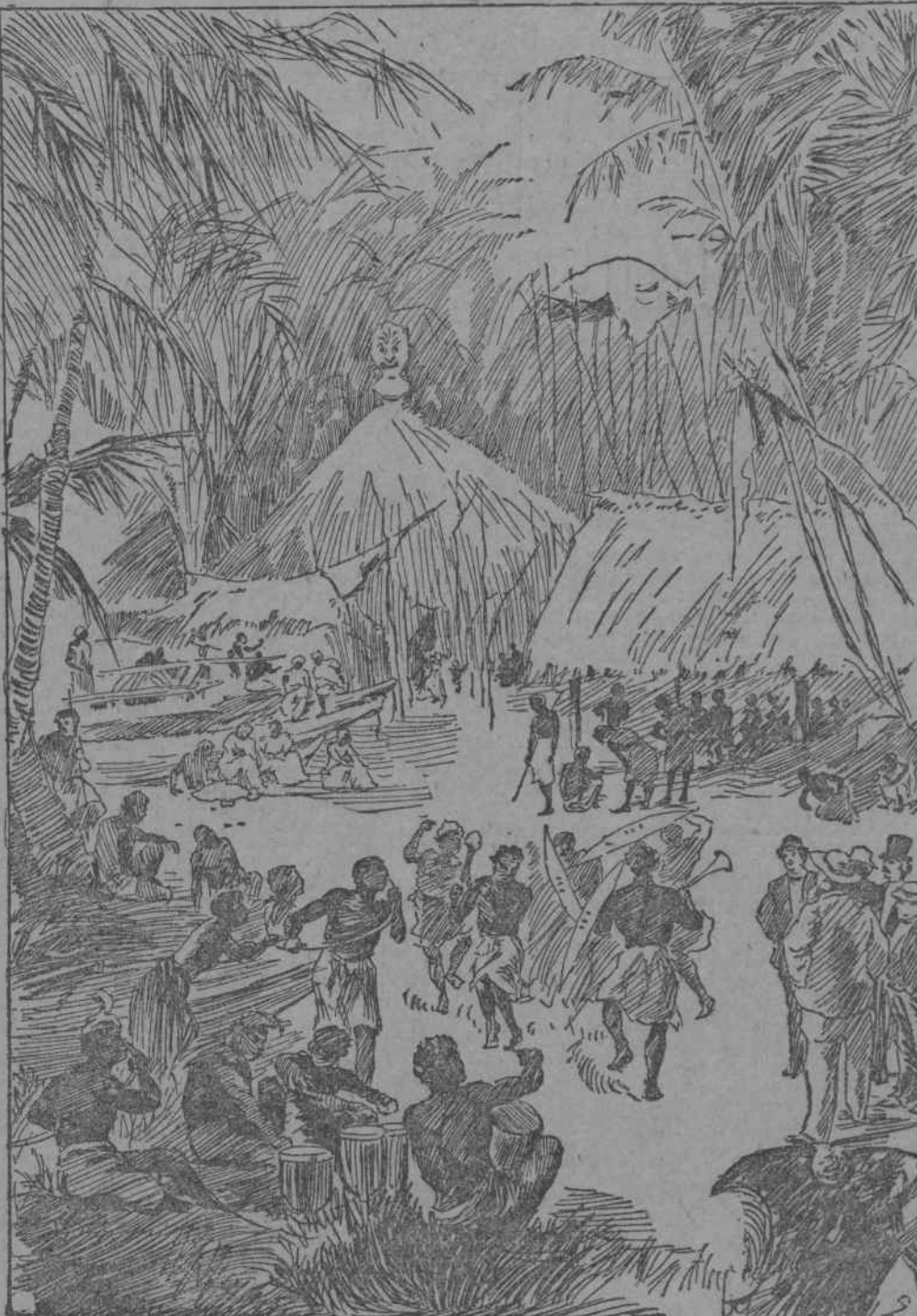
### CHAPTER XI.

Such was the first plot formed by Captain Sarol aided by the Malays and the savage natives of Erromango and the neighboring islands. What would be its end?

These fierce savages had long awaited the coming of this isle of treasure, and when Captain Sarol had given them the signal all were assembled and ready for murder and pillage. Filled with the thought of the fabulous riches which awaited the wedding, the three or four thousand natives had swarmed across the narrow strip of water that lay between them and their prey, had overpowered the coast guards, and now, with Billion City apparently at their mercy, they would know no pity and would leave not a soul alive.

Between 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning half the regular military force was massed on the observatory side of the city, acting on the belief that Captain Sarol would endeavor to gain an entrance there. With the rising of the sun came the first attack of the Malays at the point anticipated. In spite of their courageous resistance, however, the Standard Islanders were forced back about 30 in the forenoon, and the natives swarmed into the city, the town's defenders retreating slowly and finally taking refuge in the massive municipal building which had been constructed like a fortress, and which now sheltered most of the inhabitants.

"We must hold this at any cost," said the governor. "It is our last chance. But only a miracle from God can save us now." (To Be Continued in Next Sunday's Journal.)



Witnessing a Religious Dance by Cannibals.

the wedding presents. Starting from Mar-selles and travelling via the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean, the five weeks before the ceremony took place would give it ample time to arrive.

The 30th of January found Propeller Island among the Fiji group, where it was decided to halt for several days. The quartet, profiting by this delay, took one of the electric launches, with a view of ascending the Rewa River, which is a broad stream flowing through the island of Viti Levu.

Of the four Parisians, Pinchinnat had probably the queerest purpose in his mind when setting out—he wished to visit the cannibals for which this island is famous and endeavor to discover something new in a gastronomic way in order that he might have an interesting communication to make to his colleagues of the Societe des Gourmets on his return to Paris. But he narrowly escaped being himself an interesting contribution to the Fijian prototype of this society.

They had gone far up the river before they went ashore, and finally landed at what seemed to be one of the largest villages of the island. Frascolla, Yvernes and Zorn were so absorbed in strange sights they saw about them that they did not notice Pinchinnat's absence until they started to return to their boat. They hunted through the village and called him repeatedly, but with no response. Then to the mind of each came a flood of the horrible tales they had heard of these fierce cannibals, who, living far inland, were said to still practise their horrid sacrificial rites. But the tide was falling, and to obtain help they must return to Propeller Island

ling of an eye, the place was deserted by the natives, who fled into the forest in terror.

Pinchinnat was the hero of the hour on his return, and for the time being his adventure was the topic of conversation to the exclusion of the Coverly-Tankerden nuptials. But both these subjects were soon lost sight of by an unexpected occurrence.

On the afternoon of the 10th of February the news was sent over the island that a large steamer was approaching from the Northeast. Her nationality could not be ascertained, but it was expected that by the following morning she would be close at hand. It was generally supposed that she must be the ship from France bearing the trousseau of the bride and the priceless gifts for her wedding, though it hardly seemed possible that

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Hunting Tigers in the Island Park.